

American Government Class Notes
BCHS

Adaptation of *Magruder's American Government (2005 Edition)*

Ch 2, Sec I
Our Political Beginnings

Mr. Leavins

1. What country is essentially the “parent country” of the United States and the American system of government?

The United Kingdom of Great Britain (founded 1707). **England** was (and remains) the largest component of Great Britain.

Prior to the union of **England** and **Scotland** in 1707, England was the dominant power on the island of Britain. England began colonizing parts of North America prior to the creation of the United Kingdom. After the creation of **Great Britain**, the “**British**” continued colonizing parts of **North America** and other parts of the world. To this day, the **United Kingdom** remains English dominated.

2. What three big ideas from English life and government did English colonials bring with them to North America in the 1600s and 1700s?

Ordered government

Limited government

Representative government

3. What are some examples of *Ordered Government* that the English brought to their North American colonies?

They created local governments that exercised real governing duties over the colonies, all the while remaining subordinate to the English government (British government after the creation of Great Britain in 1707).

They established such offices as sheriff, coroner, assessor, justice of the peace, grand juries, counties, etc.

4. In what sense did the English colonials bring the concept of *Limited Government* to their American colonies?

They brought with them a mentality that government had to follow proper procedures of governing (**due process**), and that individuals had certain rights that government must respect and protect.

5. In what sense did the English colonials bring a belief in *Representative Government* to their North American colonies?

The English (later British) had a deeply-rooted system of representative government, particularly the **House of Commons** in **Parliament**.

England (and later Great Britain) was not anything approaching a pure democracy. And Parliament did share power with the monarch (King or Queen) for most of the years in which England/Great Britain ruled over the colonies that would become the United States of America.

But in the grand scheme of things, representative government was a powerful force in England, particularly from the English Civil War (1640s) on.

Here's a big point: The United States of America did NOT invent representative government, nor democracy.

6. What were three landmark English documents establishing and/or enhancing the English tradition of ordered government, limited government, and representative government?

The *Magna Carta*

The *Petition of Right*

The *Bill of Rights* (Don't confuse the English one with the American Bill of Rights)

7. What was the *Magna Carta*?

It was a document from 1215 signed by John I, the King of England. Essentially it was an agreement between the king and nobles regarding the power of the king relative to the nobility. The *Magna Carta* protected nobles from arbitrary actions of the king, guaranteeing such rights trial by jury, due process of law, and protections of life, liberty, and property.

The *Magna Carta* was an agreement between the powerful and the most powerful. It was not a declaration of universal rights for all people. But it was a small step in that direction. Moreover, by limiting the power of the king (relative to the nobility), it was also a step in the direction of limited government.

8. What was *The Petition of Right*?

It was a document signed by England's King Charles I. The *Petition of Right* limited royal power by requiring that new taxes be authorized by Parliament, and NOT by the king alone.

The *Petition of Right* also required that the king obey due process of law, respect the rights of the accused, and respect the property rights of homeowners in terms of sheltering the king's soldiers.

The *Petition of Right* undermined the divine right of kings theory in that the document required that the king submit to law.

9. What was the English *Bill of Rights*?

In the wake of the so-called *Glorious Revolution* of 1688--a coup in which the Stuart Monarchy of James II was overthrown and replaced by William of Orange---England's Parliament created the *English Bill of Rights*, a document guaranteeing free parliamentary elections, no peacetime standing army, fair trials, protections from cruel punishments and excessive bails.

10. What were the three types of English colonies in North America?

Royal Colonies

Proprietary Colonies

Charter Colonies

11. The thirteen colonies that ultimately became the original states of the United States of America were created over a span of around how many years?

About 125 years. The first English colony was Virginia, established at Jamestown in 1607. The last of the original 13 was Georgia, formed in Savannah in 1733.

12. What were the Royal Colonies?

These were the colonies controlled directly by the English/British monarch. In 1775, there were eight royal colonies, these being New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

13. In 1624, what colony had its company charter revoked, subsequently becoming the first royal colony?

Virginia

14. What was the pattern of government in royal colonies?

The king appointed a royal governor to preside in the colony. A royally appointed council served to advise the royal governor. This council often became the upper house of a colonial assembly (legislature). The lower house of the colonial assembly was elected by **certain property owners** among the colonial people.

The laws passed by the colonial legislatures had to be approved by the royal governor and the king.

In time, some of these royal governors became quite unpopular, and some of their actions helped trigger the American Revolution in the 1770s.

15. What were the Proprietary Colonies?

In 1775 there were three proprietary colonies, these being Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

These colonies were created as a result of a **land grant** made by the king to a proprietor. Maryland was given to Lord Baltimore in 1632. In 1681, Pennsylvania was given to William Penn. Delaware was acquired by Penn in 1682.

16. What were the Charter Colonies?

Connecticut (established 1662) and Rhode Island (established 1663) were charter colonies. These two colonies largely governed themselves. White male property owners elected the governors of these two colonies.

The colonial legislatures of Connecticut and Rhode Island passed laws without needing royal approval